

# Department of Human Services

Prepared by the  
DHS Office of  
Communications  
(517) 373-7394



## Articles in Today's Clips Friday, June 1, 2007

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June 1, 2007

## Westland newborn's mom in court

She wants to see boy she allegedly left to die

**Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News**

**WESTLAND** -- Valeeka Gartrell is accused of discarding her newborn in a sealed plastic garbage bag, but now that she's charged with attempted murder she is sad about being unable to visit the boy.

"She has pictures, but that's obviously not enough," said her lawyer, Barry Resnick. "She would love to see the baby, but there is a court order that prevents it and she will abide by the order."

Resnick has said his 27-year-old client likely was suffering from postpartum depression after giving birth in her parents home on April 23, then allegedly putting the infant in a garbage bag and leaving it in the garage.

Her mother and stepfather, unaware of the birth, took her to St. Mary's Hospital in Livonia for what they thought were pre-birth complications, police said.

After being told at the hospital that Gartrell had already given birth, the stepfather hurried home to find the baby. The boy, whom authorities say was sealed inside the plastic sack for up to four hours, survived and is in the custody of relatives. Gartrell is free on \$50,000 bond but was ordered to have no contact with the baby. Gartrell is living with a cousin.

On Thursday, Gartrell sobbed before appearing briefly before 18th District Judge Charles Bokos. Missing medical records caused a preliminary examination of charges of attempted murder and first-degree child abuse to be delayed until June 21.

Under Michigan's "Safe Delivery" law enacted in 2001 to avoid harm to unwanted newborns, a child can be surrendered to any emergency service provider within 72 hours of birth without threat of prosecution.

Resnick didn't ask the judge for a change in the order that has prevented Gartrell from seeing the child. Resnick said his client was unwilling to comment on the case.

"She's having great anxiety," he said.

You can reach Doug Guthrie at (734) 462-2674 or [dguthrie@detnews.com](mailto:dguthrie@detnews.com).

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Jun 1, 6:20 AM EDT

## **Westland newborn's mom wants to see boy found in plastic bag**

WESTLAND, Mich. (AP) -- The mother of a newborn boy found alive inside a plastic bag at a home after she was taken to a hospital wants to see the child.

Valeeka Gartrell, 27, is accused of discarding her newborn in a sealed plastic garbage bag. She is sad that she can't visit the boy since she's charged with attempted murder and first-degree child abuse, her lawyer told The Detroit News for a story Friday.

"She has pictures, but that's obviously not enough," Barry Resnick said. "She would love to see the baby, but there is a court order that prevents it and she will abide by the order."

Resnick has said his client likely was suffering from postpartum depression after giving birth on April 23. Unaware of the birth, Gartrell's mother and stepfather took her to St. Mary's Hospital in Livonia for what they thought were pre-birth complications, police said.

But when hospital staff told the parents she already had given birth, police said the stepfather rushed to the family's Westland home and followed the child's cries to the garage.

Gartrell's preliminary examination was adjourned Thursday to allow her attorney time to obtain her medical records and those of her child. The exam will resume June 21 in 18th District Court in Westland, the Detroit Free Press reported.

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This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News**  
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June 1, 2007

## Adopted twins' life with mom was 'nightmare,' prosecutor says

Edward L. Cardenas / The Detroit News

**MOUNT CLEMENS** -- A 30-year-old Warren woman was portrayed Thursday in Macomb Circuit Court as an abusive mother who broke the dreams of her 8-year-old adoptive daughters with constant punishment and torture.

Tamika Williams, whose trial began Thursday, is accused of abusing the girls since she adopted them in 2005 from a foster care home in Southfield.

"They had hopes and dreams of a new life. A new life with a mom," said Jennifer Andary, Macomb assistant prosecutor. "Their dreams of a new life became a nightmare."

The children are alleged to have suffered bruises, welts and cigarette burns at the hands of their adoptive mother. They are now in foster care, and are expected to take the stand today against Williams.

Williams is charged with two counts of torture and two counts of child abuse. She could face up to life in prison.

The girls were removed from the home on Nov. 16 after teachers at Warrendale Elementary School reported an injury to one of the girls.

Andary said Williams beat the children with belts, a bat and shoes; bathed them in bleach; and bit them.

"Saying these little girls were under her care is offensive," she said in her opening statement. "They were under her control."

Defense attorney Ronald Goldstein did not give an opening statement.

Third-grade teacher Diane McAllister was the first witness called by the prosecution Thursday.

She testified that the twins had numerous absences and tardy arrivals that affected their schoolwork. She also noticed that one of the girls had yellowish skin and looked jaundiced. On Nov. 15, the day before the girls were taken from the home, she noticed a "large red mark" on one of the girls.

"She said she received an Indian burn on the way home from school the previous day," said McAllister.

She informed the school principal, who in turn told the school social worker. After she reported the incident, the kids were taken from the school.

*You can reach Edward L. Cardenas at (586) 468-0529 or [ecardenas@detnews.com](mailto:ecardenas@detnews.com).*

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Press & Argus

June 1, 2007

## **Child-abuse case sent to Circuit**

A local judge ruled Wednesday that there is enough evidence to send to a man to trial who is accused of abusing his nearly 2-month-old son.

Livingston County District Judge Suzanne Geddis said there was enough evidence to send to Circuit Court second-degree child abuse allegations lodged against Jason Edward Rigsby.

The judge's decision came after hearing testimony about the infant's injuries, including dislocated shoulder and fractures.

Chief George Basar of the Howell Police Department said Rigsby initially told police that his son was crying April 2 and wouldn't stop, so he pulled him out of a swing by the arm.

Rigsby said he took his son to a local hospital after realizing the baby was injured. Hospital officials contacted Child Protective Services, who, in turn, called Howell police.



## Canton couple who enslaved Cameroon girl sentenced to prison

May 31, 2007

By FREE PRESS STAFF

A Canton couple was sentenced late Wednesday to prison for conspiring to enslave a young girl from Cameroon.

Joseph Djoumessi, 49, was sentenced to 17 years in prison, and his wife, Evelyn, 42, received 5 years in prison for illegally bringing a 14-year-old girl to the United States in late 1996, then forcing her to care for their children, and cook and clean their home without compensation. The Djoumessis are Cameroon nationals.

Joseph Djoumessi, a lawyer, was found guilty by a judge in March 2006 of forcing the girl to work against her will. Evelyn Djoumessi, a pharmacist, was convicted by a jury the same month.

U.S. District Judge Arthur Tarnow imposed the sentences Wednesday, and also ordered the couple to pay \$100,000 in restitution to the victim.

The girl was brought in the country under an assumed name after being coached for two years by others in Cameroon about assuming a false identity, federal officials say.

An Oakland County Circuit Court jury convicted the couple, formerly of Farmington Hills, of state charges in 2001. The husband was sentenced to 9 to 15 years in prison for third-degree criminal sexual conduct, a felony, and third-degree child abuse, a misdemeanor. His wife was convicted of child abuse and sentenced to probation. Joseph Djoumessi has already served seven of the 9- to 15-year sentence.

The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office in Detroit began investigating the case in 2000 after a neighbor of the couple notified the Farmington Hills Police Department of suspicion of the girl being held against her will. The police then notified the ICE.

The girl, now a college student, was allowed to stay in the United States.

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Published May 31, 2007

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## **Mich. couple sentenced for enslaving Cameroonian girl**

Midday update

Associated Press

DETROIT - A couple who brought a teenage Cameroonian girl to the U.S. and used her as a slave in their home have been sentenced to time in federal prison.

Joseph Djoumessi was sentenced Wednesday to 17 years, and his wife, Evelyn Djoumessi, was sentenced to five years. They also were ordered to pay \$100,000 in restitution to the victim.

In March 2006, the Djoumessis were convicted of conspiracy to commit involuntary servitude. Authorities said they broke federal law by bringing a then-14-year-old west African girl to the United States in 1996 and using her as an unpaid domestic servant in their Farmington Hills home for more than three years.

They said the couple threatened, beat and sexually abused the girl.

A suburban Detroit jury in 2001 found the Djoumessis guilty of child abuse and also convicted Joseph Djoumessi of criminal sexual conduct.

He was sentenced to nine to 15 years in state prison, and his wife was put on probation for three years.

The jury acquitted them of kidnapping charges.

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Cass forms 'Safe Kids' chapter

*Thursday, May 31, 2007 9:56 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS - Sheriff Joseph M. Underwood Jr. Wednesday announced a collaborative effort by county agencies to form the Cass County Chapter of "Safe Kids."

This program is designed to create an environment in Michigan where children 14 and under are free from accidental injuries through community partnerships, advocacy, public awareness, distribution of safety equipment and education on the proper use of safety devices.

Safe Kids of Cass County consists of agencies such as the Sheriff's Office, Dowagiac Police Department, Pokagon Band Tribal Police, Pokagon Band Head Start, state Department of Human Services (DHS), Cass County Family Court, Van Buren/Cass Health Department, Dowagiac Union Schools, Cassopolis Public Schools, Child Care Resources, Cassopolis Fire Department, Tri-County Head Start, Woodlands and the Cass County Prosecutor's Office.

One area of focus along with many is injuries and deaths related to motor vehicle crashes.

The "Safe Kids" Cass County Chapter is hosting a car seat inspection to launch this new program.

Nationally-certified child passenger safety technicians will perform inspections and train parents as well as caregivers to install and adjust their car seats properly, free of charge, due to the support of local businesses and agencies.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading killer of children under 14 years of age.

Properly used, a car seat reduces the risk of death by 71 percent for rear-facing infants and 54 percent for forward-facing toddlers.

A booster seat reduces the risk of death by 59 percent for children ages 4 to 8 years old.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, approximately 73 percent of all child passenger restraints, more than 80 percent of car seats and about 40 percent of booster seats are used incorrectly.

Safe Kids of Cass County will host its car seat inspection on Saturday, June 16, from 1 to 5 p.m. at C. Wimberley's General Motors dealership on M-51 South, Dowagiac.

Safe Kids Cass County asks that you bring your child to insure accurate training designed specifically for your child.

This training usually takes approximately 20 to 30 minutes.

They will have seven technicians available to assist with your questions.

If you need more information, please contact Deputy Katie White at (269) 445-8644, ext. 432.





## Clinic reaches outside big city to the under-insured

Friday, June 01, 2007

By Pat Shellenbarger

The Grand Rapids Press

GREENVILLE -- The pain in her left leg began three days ago, which is why Tammy Johnson was waiting for an ultrasound Thursday to determine if the cause was a life-threatening blood clot.

Like many other patients who arrive at Spectrum Health United Memorial Hospital in Greenville, she has no commercial health insurance. Johnson, 44, has only limited benefits under a state program called the Mid-Michigan Health Plan.

"I don't think it will cover it," she said, but, since she is diabetic, she could not ignore the pain.

It is for people such as Johnson -- the unemployed, under-employed and uninsured -- that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services this week approved a \$525,000 grant to open a health clinic in Greenville.

While the nonprofit Cherry Street Health Services operates 11 clinics for low-income residents in metropolitan Grand Rapids, this will be its first outside the city.

"I think there's a very strong need, particularly for those people who are uninsured," said Chris Shea, Cherry Street's executive director.

The unemployment rate in Montcalm County was 12.3 percent in April, well above the statewide average of 7.1 percent. Much of that is due to the closing of the Electrolux refrigerator plant in 2005 with the loss of 2,400 jobs, the elimination of another 300 from parts suppliers and 200 with the closing of the Tower Automotive plant last year.

Two years ago, it was estimated that 13 percent of the county's 60,000 residents were uninsured, Shea said, but that number likely is much higher now.

"The perception is with Electrolux and other manufacturing plants closing, it certainly left a lot of people uninsured," he said.

The move to open a Greenville clinic began three years ago, but was dropped because of a lack of funding.

In recent months, as the area's unemployment rate increased, officials at United Memorial noticed a growing number of uninsured showing up at the emergency room for services that could be provided at a doctor's office.

A coalition of government and business leaders revived the clinic idea and approached Cherry Street Health Services, Greenville City Manager George Bosanic said. The federal grant allowing it to become a reality was announced Thursday by U.S. Rep. Vernon Ehlers, R-Grand Rapids, and David Camp, R-Midland.

"From our perspective, the city's perspective, this is very, very good news," Bosanic said.

The clinic, to be called the Montcalm Area Health Center, will open by Nov. 1 in the Maplewood Health Center on Maplewood Street at M-57, Shea said.

While patients with insurance are welcome, no one will be turned away, he said. The uninsured will be charged as little as \$15 for a doctor's visit, depending on income and the family's size, he said.

The clinic will offer medical, dental and mental health services. Montcalm County has higher than average rates of preventable injuries, respiratory disease, cancer, heart disease and teen pregnancy, Shea said, some of which may be due to the uninsured delaying medical care.

Johnson, a part-time cook at a Cedar Springs restaurant, knows a lot of people who are trying to get by without health insurance.

That includes her sister, Debbie Hayman, who was keeping Johnson company in the hospital waiting room.

"There's sometimes I don't go (to the doctor), because I don't have insurance," said Hayman, 49. "I know a lot of people that don't have it."

**Send e-mail to the author: [pshellenbarger@grpress.com](mailto:pshellenbarger@grpress.com)**

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## Muskegon Chronicle

### Meeting to focus on juvenile shoplifting

Friday, June 01, 2007

#### FROM LOCAL REPORTS

Juvenile shoplifting will be the subject of an informational meeting Wednesday at the Muskegon Area Career Tech Center, 200 Harvey.

Leading the discussion, set for 9 to 10 a.m., will be the Brian P. Mattson Restorative Justice Center. The center has created a program that addresses accountability for offenders and shows them that shoplifting is not a "victimless crime." The meeting will focus on community benefits and future enhancement of the program.

Store owners, managers, loss prevention personnel and anyone else interested are encouraged to attend. To register or for more information, call Jackie Hallberg at (231) 727-3318 ext. 103 or e-mail her at [jhallberg\\_rjc@verizon.net](mailto:jhallberg_rjc@verizon.net).

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## THE ANN ARBOR NEWS

### Fill the Gazebo organizers hope to top 2005 food drive

Friday, June 01, 2007

**BY TOM TOLEN**

**News Staff Reporter**

Organizers hope to exceed last year's total of 10 tons of nonperishable food and other items collected during the fifth annual Fill the Gazebo event Saturday to benefit Gleaners Community Food Bank. The event will run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at Mill Pond Park on West Main Street in downtown Brighton.

"The community has really pulled together to support this cause," says Michelle Ounanian, a Gleaners spokeswoman.

Gleaners co-sponsors the event with the Livingston County Association of Realtors.

The event was organized five years ago by Brighton Mayor Steve Monet and local real estate agents. With the downturn in the state economy, many former food donors in a county that historically has been considered affluent have become recipients, Ounanian says.

That is evidenced by the increase in the number of people taking advantage of the Shared Harvest Food Pantry program, in which people pick out the items they need from a large selection, as they would at a regular grocery store.

"Twenty percent have never had to visit the food pantry before," Ounanian says. "They could be middle-class folks who have fallen on hard times or who have become 'house poor,' or who have lost their jobs."

Ounanian says the Shared Harvest Food Pantry program has seen a 30 percent increase each year in the number of people it serves since 2003, and now feeds up to 500 households per month. The Gleaners program overall has provided 636,000 meals over the last four years.

People are being asked to donate nonperishable foods, "especially high-protein like peanut butter, canned tuna, canned meats and macaroni and cheese, plus toiletries and laundry detergent," says Michele Brant, executive director of the real estate association.

Cash contributions are always welcome, because Gleaners, with its volume purchasing power, gets more "bang for the buck" that way. Brandt says Gleaners can feed one person for a day for just \$1.

Ounanian assures that all of the donated items will remain in Livingston County. "We process it and distribute it to 25 partner agencies in Livingston County," she says. A good portion of the donated items go to the local food pantry, which feeds about 1,500 people per month.

Those who can't make it Saturday may drop off donated items at the food pantry anytime during regular hours. The pantry is located at 5840 Sterling Drive in Genoa Township, phone 517-548-3710. Hours are Monday, Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m. to noon; Tuesday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5 to 7 p.m.

Tom Tolen can be reached at [ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com](mailto:ttolen@livingstoncommunitynews.com) or at 810-844-2009.

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# Detroit Expects Half of Iraqi Refugees

By JEFF KAROUB  
Associated Press Writer

Jun 1, 3:38 AM EDT

DETROIT (AP) -- Immigration aid workers here expect that as many as half of the nearly 7,000 Iraqi refugees who will be brought into the United States by the end of September will settle in the area.

Lutheran Social Services of Michigan has received government data on numerous refugees recommended for resettlement, said Belmin Pinjic, the service's director of refugee services.

"That's the first sign that someone is in the process and should be coming," he said. "How long that process should take, we don't know."

The agency has already started to contact the prospective refugees' family members who live in the Detroit area, Pinjic said.

The Department of Homeland Security said this week it has approved the refugee applications of 59 Iraqis who should be arriving in the coming weeks. The department provided no details about where they would settle but said it has already completed interviews in refugee cases involving more than 700 men, women and children.

The Bush administration announced in February it would allow up to 7,000 Iraqis into the U.S. by the end of September - up from 202 in 2006. It would be the largest Iraqi influx since the 2003 invasion.

Besides contacting relatives of refugees, immigration groups in the Detroit area have been locating translators, transportation and housing, and fielding donations of furniture, clothing and appliances, Pinjic said.

Southeastern Michigan has about 300,000 people who trace their roots to the Middle East. They are heavily concentrated in the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, widely considered the capital of Arab America because of its national Arab-American museum, many mosques and scores of Arabic-

signed businesses.

Pinjic and others expect that as many as half of the new refugees will come to the area - either initially or after first resettling elsewhere.

Iraqi community leaders in Los Angeles and Orange County, Calif., which also have large Iraqi populations, said they hadn't yet heard of any refugees being settled in the area. They also complained about the small number of refugees being allowed to enter the U.S. compared with the 2 million who have fled Iraq.

"Fifty-nine people is too little, too late," said Imam Mostafa Al-Qazwini, leader of the Islamic Educational Center of Orange County. "What's the big deal about 59 coming here when we have hundreds of thousands of people in Syria, Jordan, Iran and others displaced inside Iraq?"

Mosques in Southern California helped resettle refugees after the 1991 Gulf War, he said. They provided English classes, health services and financial help to new arrivals, he said, and would be ready and willing to do so again.

Tennessee also is bracing for refugees. Nashville is home to the nation's largest community of expatriate Kurds, estimated at 8,000. They were a persecuted minority under Saddam Hussein's rule.

"Frankly, we've got so many Iraqis ... (they'll) be easy," said Holly Johnson, director of refugee and immigration services for Nashville-based Catholic Charities of Tennessee. "They're the least of our worries."

Nashville immigration groups also are preparing for refugee groups from Burma and Burundi, she said.

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Associated Press writer Peter Prengaman in Los Angeles contributed to this report.